

I. INTRODUCTION

I.A THE COMMUNITY'S VISION

This Plan expresses a Vision for Gloucester, founded on its cultural, economic, and environmental diversity. The Vision serves as the introduction to this document, and should be read carefully, its messages echoed throughout the Plan. This Vision shows appreciation for the existing qualities of Gloucester; and recognizes that preservation of these features can happen only through thoughtful action. Change and growth will occur, with or without a plan; the Plan seeks to control that change, reflecting the widespread community concern that diversity will diminish and that character will fade.



This Plan was prepared through citizen participation, rather than through traditional methods of planning. The Plan has many authors who have labored over the issues and choices that confront the city.

This Plan is constructed around community values that set standards for success into the foreseeable future, while recognizing that progress in realizing the Vision will be incremental. Some steps should be taken very soon, others will take longer. By following a steady path, the City can reach the full, long-term Vision of this Plan.

I.B. THE ROLE OF THE PLAN IN GLOUCESTER'S FUTURE

Setting a Policy Framework and an Agenda for Action

This Plan establishes a positive policy framework that sets expectations for performance. Interrelated Goals and Objectives and agenda for action are built on strategies to achieve the City Vision. This is not a traditional plan of data collection and analysis followed by specific recommendations. The Plan should guide decisions by the Mayor, City Council, and of the boards and commissions. Existing regulations and policies should be reviewed and revised to reflect the Goals and Objectives of the Plan. As a policy framework, it can also inspire parallel adoption of supportive policies by organizations with missions linked to the future of the City.

As an agenda for action, the Plan lists suggested strategies and responsibilities. In most cases, existing boards, commissions and City agencies will be responsible for carrying out the agenda. It should be used to assign tasks and responsibilities. In some cases, the Plan recommends new committees and staff positions to provide focused guidance. The agenda should be used to allocate resources through operating budgets and capital expenditures to meet specific purposes. It will also be a basis for seeking new resources from within the community and in seeking funds from state, federal, and foundation sources to achieve community goals.

Charting a Better Future for Gloucester

The Comprehensive Community Development Plan for Gloucester charts a future that could not be achieved without the new initiatives and coordinated efforts envisioned by the Plan. Without new tools, resources and commitment, the City will be far less capable of setting its own course. This Plan responds to pressing current problems and trends that have potential to reduce the quality-of-life and special identity of Gloucester.

The attractions of Gloucester and the success of the regional economy have led to tremendous pressure on the housing market as prices rise throughout the region. As long as the region maintains this economic health, there will be steady pressure for more development, resulting in higher prices for land and homes that benefit from Gloucester's geography and natural beauty. The visual character of a picturesque and distinctive community will be diminished, as traditional village patterns become blurred by dispersed low-density development. Existing pressures on the environment will increase. The City currently has limited means to alter these trends.

The economic and cultural diversity of Gloucester could gradually disappear, as those with wealth or high incomes steadily become an increasing proportion of the community. People with limited incomes - including the elderly on modest, fixed incomes - will find Gloucester increasingly unaffordable and gradually move elsewhere. People who have grown up in the community will find it too costly to continue to live in Gloucester unless they can develop the skills needed for jobs with higher-than average salaries. Workers, artists and craftspeople in the city will choose to live elsewhere, so that their paychecks are not consumed by the local high living costs. Many local employers already find it difficult to hire because of the high cost of housing; this trend could continue, choking the ability of local businesses to remain profitable, stifling growth or encouraging relocation, with a resulting loss in the tax base. The City today lacks a comprehensive strategy to protect affordability for its citizens or expand the prosperity of the community.

Meeting a Civic Obligation

A Comprehensive Plan is mandated by Section 5-1(b) of the Gloucester City Charter which states in part: "Community Development Plan - The planning board shall prepare a community development plan as authorized by MGL chapter 41, section 81-D" which, in turn, states in part: "A planning board established in any city or town under section 81-A shall make a master plan of such city or town...and from time to time may extend or perfect such plan." The Plan 2000 Committee, under the auspices of the Gloucester Planning Board, prepared this Plan through a public, citizen-driven process, called Plan 2000, administered by the Community Development Department. The last Plan for the city was done in 1990. After public

review and comment, the Plan was formally adopted by the Planning Board on August 13, 2001 and will be submitted for review and consideration by the Mayor and City Council.

Setting the Stage for the Next Steps

The recommendations of the Plan assign specific responsibilities and emphasize the need for ongoing stewardship, through an Implementation Committee. This Committee will monitor progress on the recommendations, and provide a clearinghouse to keep citizens informed on issues that must be addressed to maintain the schedule of actions called for in this report. The Plan Implementation Committee will be linked to the Planning Board, and provide annual reports to the Mayor, City Council, and boards and commissions charting the successes and additional challenges

I.C. THE PLANNING PROCESS

Process Overview

"...what remains interesting in those talks is not what we agreed upon but how, through all the complexity and confusion, we found a path to agreement. The task was to fix on the broad line along which we wanted to move, and then by increasingly specific development find what was common ground and what was not. Disagreements could be dealt with last, and would then appear not as isolated points of principle but as items in an otherwise workable scheme. We did not begin with papers, which so often divert readers to trivia, but with dialogue. To aid in it we had colleagues of high quality."

Interestingly, although this quote describes a Cold War negotiation recorded by Dean Acheson, a mid-twentieth century secretary of state, it aptly summarizes the planning process of Plan 2000 and provides guidance in implementing the resulting Plan.

Planning Process Chronology

During the first phase of Plan 2000's evolution, meetings were held to seek public opinion regarding the future of the City of Gloucester, fixing on a broad line along which we wished to proceed, culminating in a Planning Festival, held on a Saturday morning in late January 2000. Several hundred people gathered in City Hall to share their deep concerns for Gloucester's future. Two committees were instrumental in planning the Plan: the Plan 2000 Committee, a broadly based group with a purposely fluid membership and the Coordinating Committee, to organize and advise the Plan 2000 Committee on issues and activities for consideration, discussion and approval. Use of the City's web page and internet access provided new opportunities for citizens to learn about the Plan and to contribute their ideas.

The second phase "of increasingly specific development to find what was common ground and what was not" spanned the spring, summer and fall of 2000, starting with a series of meetings on key topics - land use, housing, open space, the harbor and the economy. Planning consultants, the Cecil Group, assisted in facilitating meetings and recording and interpreting results. During the Fall, interactive meetings were held in four geographical areas of the city, and five interest-area workshops - economic, housing, growth management, environment and social/cultural resources. They presented information and recorded comment. Subsequently, a citywide meeting with over 100 participants compressed and dovetailed results from the Fall meetings into prioritized Goals and Objectives.

The third and final phase of the plan's evolution, during which disagreements were dealt with last "not as isolated points of principle but as items in a workable scheme," began with a Planning Forum in City Hall in late January, 2001. Alternative strategies to meet Goals and Objectives were presented, discussed and refined through facilitated discussions among over 300 participants. Those strategies became the working drafts of this Comprehensive Plan; these were reviewed and revised by the Coordinating Committee and interested Plan 2000 Committee members and distributed as a final draft for public review and comment, prior to finalization, adoption and . . . action.

I.D. USING THE PLAN

General Considerations

This Comprehensive Plan 2001, a Community Development Plan for the City of Gloucester, is meant to be a guide for framing decisions in the city. It is a dramatic departure from typical master plans. It does not dictate, recognizing that it will function in an uncertain political climate where the level of uncertainty increases the farther one looks into the future. It was fashioned to adapt to that climate. Consequently, strategies, rather than specific solutions for specific problems, have been developed to achieve a broad range of goals and objectives. These strategies are presented as consistent comprehensive policy recommendations and suggestions for actions.

Meeting expectations and dealing with recommendations of the Plan will follow time-tested public processes in the city. Boards and commissions and the City Council will follow the same procedures that they have followed with past plans - unless they, themselves, adopt new procedures. The 2001 Plan, through its strategies approach, suggests how recommendations can be carried out to meet Plan Goals and Objectives. The 1990 Master Plan, by way of contrast, specified actions themselves. Here, it is important to emphasize that once a recommendation for action is transmitted by well-established procedures to the Council, the process by which that recommendation was generated is largely immaterial. At that point, the Council, as the city's legislative body, swings into action and ultimately votes "yea" or "nay" based on the merit, relevance and political acceptability of the recommendation.

Performance Standards

Throughout this plan, recommendations suggest actions and development to conform to neighborhood character, to meet certain expectations, and to protect special places. This can not be accomplished through traditional zoning (the basis of existing Gloucester land use regulations) with specifications and numerical standards that apply inflexibly to all projects. Suggested approaches to regulations rely, instead, on performance standards that allow a range of actions, as long as the impacts perform to clearly articulated objectives and meet previously agreed expectations. Performance standards may apply to neighborhood character, to individual site features, environmental integrity, or traffic or noise that might be generated, and become the basis for determining acceptable proposals. Performance standards will be added over a baseline of acceptable zoning standards. The Community Development Department and City boards and commissions and the City Council, all with liberal measures of public process, will be responsible for developing and approving performance standards and application procedures.

Implementation

Successful implementation of the 10-year plan will depend upon careful monitoring, thoughtful oversight and periodic reporting by the Plan Implementation Committee, called for in the Plan. Because implementation of the Plan will require the combined efforts of current and Plan-proposed City staff, as well as citizen-member boards, commissions and committees, the Implementation Table presented in the last section of the Plan will prove useful for managing implementation activities and for providing a baseline to monitor progress. This table summarizes the recommended actions and suggests priorities and a time frame for these actions. From that summary, readers can refer to the Plan elements that include Goals and Objectives and the strategies for realizing these Goals and Objectives that were agreed upon throughout the lengthy public process and approval period. Nothing is set in stone; responsibility may be more effectively carried out by entities different from those envisioned by Plan authors; the Table is a starting place.

Amending The Plan

In situations where formal amendments are necessary, the same public process employed in generating the Plan can be used in proposing amendments to the Plan. Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, Section 81-D dictates that the procedure for amending the Plan is the same as adoption of the original Plan. In this way, the Plan can continue to evolve as the City Council and boards and commissions and the Plan Implementation Committee present draft amendments for approval by the Planning Board.

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